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UNCLAS HO CHI MINH CITY 000886

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/BCLTV, DRL/IRF, DS/IP/EAP, DS/IP/ITA,  
DS/CC

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [ASEC](#) [VM](#)

SUBJECT: HCMC POLICE RELEASE ATTEMPTED SELF-IMMOLATION  
PERPETRATOR

REF: A) HCMC 878 and previous; B) HANOI 1389 and previous

1. (SBU) HCMC police contacts told RSO on August 23 that they had just released from custody the individual who attempted self-immolation in front of the Consulate on August 19 (ref A). They refused to divulge any details on the individual, other than reiterating that he was "mentally unstable." However, a Hoa Hao religious dissident website claimed the person to be Le Van Duong, approximately 54 years old, from Chau Thanh District, Tien Giang Province. (Note: Tien Giang is one of the centers of Hoa Haoism in the Mekong Delta. End Note.) According to the website, Duong attempted self-immolation to protest the State's seizure of his land and home. Separately, on August 20, Hoa Hao dissident leader Le Quang Liem gave a phone interview to Radio Free Asia, asserting that the individual must have attempted self-immolation to protest "GVN oppression against religious groups."

2. (SBU) Comment: Our local guard force remains on heightened alert should Duong or other Hoa Hao activists attempt self-immolation in front of the Consulate. We also quietly have briefed other foreign missions on the August 19 incident.

3. (SBU) Comment Continued: The HCMC authorities' release of the perpetrator -- a person who they acknowledge is mentally unstable -- after four days in custody stands in sharp contrast to the continued involuntary commitment in a mental institution of Baptist Pastor Than Van Truong in neighboring Dong Nai Province (ref B). In the Truong case, police and medical staff have told us that he poses no threat to himself, his family, or his community. End Comment.

WINNICK